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**KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

## FIRST PERSON

# Living and Learning

### **The USAID-funded Street Law program changes the outlook of a young Muslim Woman**



***“I’ve learned that our state guarantees and protects religious freedom... I am sure that I can defend my rights if I am in a conflict situation.”***

- Nasiba, participant of the Street Law program.

21 year old Nasiba Begmatova is the fourth child in a family from the remote village of Syrt, located in the Kadamzhaiskiy Region, Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. After she finished secondary school, Nasiba’s parents wanted her to know the basics of Islam and sent her to study at the Bishkek Islamic University. In 2005, Nasiba transferred to the Islamic Institute in Osh.

Nasiba lives and studies at the Osh madrassa with 36 other young women aged 17-21. Like the other students, she leads a life governed by a strict schedule and only rarely leaves the compound of the madrassa. Nasiba prays five times every day and in between she has lessons on the Quran, Arabic, and on morals. After the classes, the students prepare their meals, listen to the radio to learn about recent events in the world as there is no television at school. The students typically only visit their native villages on holidays and only rarely are received a visit from a relative.

When the USAID-funded Street Law program was introduced at the madrassa, Nasiba and her fellow students found the new program quite different from what they were accustomed. They were not used to working as a group or express their opinion. But soon, Nasiba overcame her concerns. Now, every week we are waiting for the next Street Law lesson,” says Nasiba.

Describing how legal education has helped her, Nasiba says: “First of all I am not afraid of militiamen any more, I am not afraid that they will prosecute me because I wear a hijab. I’ve learned that our state guarantees and protects religious freedom, and it helps me to overcome my fear.”

Nasiba is a talented student and a quick learner. She is planning her future when she will graduate from the Institute in a year: “Inshaallah, I will learn to sew and become a professional seamstress. One should learn a lot in life!” For now, she simply aspires to serve as an example for other students of the Islamic Institute.

Nasiba is one of approximately 400 students who participated in USAID-funded street law programs in 10 madrassas and 2 Islamic Institutes across the country.